

DISCUSSION EXAMPLES

Example 1: Tom and Sue are employees in your department. Tom has a higher position, but he is not Sue's manager. Tom and Sue have always had a friendly relationship and have shared jokes back and forth, mainly about the Packers and the Bears. Tom has occasionally complimented Sue on a new haircut or outfit. At some point, Tom asks Sue to go to a basketball game with him, and Sue thanks Tom but declines, telling Tom that she has a policy of never mixing work with pleasure. Tom accepts Sue's position and does not ask her out again. Things proceed as usual, until weeks later, when Tom becomes upset with Sue because she misses a deadline on a very important report and blames her co-worker.

Sue comes to you and complains that Tom is harassing her.

What issues do you need to look into?

Now change the facts. After Sue turns down Tom's social invitation, Tom continues to compliment Sue's clothing, including statements such as, "that blouse looks really good on you," and "I like those high heeled boots on you." Tom also sends four men and Sue a joke about "getting some" while on vacation. Tom sends Sue a follow up text saying "see what you're missing?" Tom and Sue then have the disagreement about Sue's report.

Do these facts change anything in how you view the situation?

Example 2: You are at a conference attended by many college administrators. At one of the receptions, you notice that people are eating, drinking, relaxing and having a good time. A few of your employees are at the event. One of them comes to you the next day and says that things got "out of hand" the night before. She says that a group of men was telling "disgusting jokes" at a table, but they were so loud that everyone could hear them. She also reports that when she got on the elevator to go up to her hotel room, a group of the men got on the elevator and promised that they would not "make a sandwich" with her in the crowded elevator. She said that one of the men, a Trustee from another college, "often doesn't know when to stop" when he is at conferences.

Is there possible harassment involved?

Should you take any action at this point?

Example 3: Your department likes to go out after work, sometimes to bars, to socialize. Kevin is a single guy who never joins the group and tends to keep to himself. In addition, while most employees like video games and football, Kevin does not join in on those conversations. Kevin keeps a Bible on the corner of his workstation. Mike and Marla, who tend to be "outspoken" about other employees, start to refer to Kevin as "church boy." Marla also sends an internet joke to the whole department that includes a photo of a scantily clad woman, and in her email she writes "Enjoy you guys--of course--"

except you Kevin--not your 'type' I'm sure." Kevin often laughs at these jokes and often makes a halo over his head with his hands when he is called church boy. But you have heard Kevin utter statements of frustration under his breath.

Is this possible harassment?

Should you do anything with this situation?

Example 4: You have a professor on campus who is known for publishing articles that criticize affirmative action initiatives on college campuses. Due to the location of her office, she is in and around offices where several students of color work. She and one of her colleagues can sometimes be heard debating issues related to affirmative action and race-based college admissions issues.

Should you be concerned about this?